5: Schwimmer E-4,5 (1966-1967) 1973
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23
Mountain Orokaiva

121 gain will be not only ethnographic but also theoretical: we shall have learnt that the analysis of mediating elements in exchange may provide the key to social structure in an exchange-oriented culture.

2. *Taro Ancestors*

924 I shall begin the analysis of taro symbolism with one myth especially rich in
773 content, which includes all of the five characters, some of whom, in one way or
another, appear in all the myths. It also stands out by the clarity of its detail on
244 the cultivation cycle. As I proceed, I shall discuss some variant myths which
539 emphasise certain themes omitted in the main one or convey the same message in different codes.

The myth is part of the Totoima cycle. It has been reported, very incompletely, by Williams (1930: 155, 158–9, 276) who believed that 'the eating of Totoima's body is generally made to account for nothing more than differences of dialect'. On the other hand the informant who told me the myth in Sivepe volunteered the explanation that it was the story of the origin of taro cultivation. His version, the fullest of a number collected, did not mention the name Totoima, but it occurred in different versions of the same tale given to me by others in the Sasembata district.

1. A husband slept with his wife. She became pregnant and gave birth to a male child. The husband came and asked: 'Woman, where does the boy come from?' 'I have just given birth to him.' 'Then he is mine to eat. Strike and sever him; when he is dead cut him up and cook him for me to eat,' he said.

(*Commentary*: These words are clearer if we remember that the narrator is thinking simultaneously of a woman giving birth to a child and a woman harvesting a taro. The Orokaiva believe that a growing taro has spirit life and that this spirit life is lodged in the leafy top. Therefore a taro does not die when it is harvested but the spirit life stays in it as long as the leafy top is not severed from the tuber. The act of cutting the top from the taro thus always bears a symbolic similarity to the act of killing. We shall see later that there is a crucial difference between gifts of taro with and without the tops.)

2. The woman was very sad because she had to kill and cook her child. They slept together again and this time the woman gave birth to a female child which was treated in the same manner. Male twin children followed next. But when the man came to fetch these, he could not find them. The mother had taken them to a hiding-place where she covered them with a heap of weeds (*bivese*) by the root of a tree.

(*Commentary*: The word *bivese*, used in all versions of the tale, is a gardening term used to describe a heap of weeds left in a field after clearing. It was a woman's task to keep taro plants snugly protected after planting by using these weeds as a cover. The tale thus continues to unfold on two levels: the social and horticultural level. The twins are being treated in the manner of seed taro after planting.)

3. On some pretext, the mother returned to the field, nursed the children and covered them over again. When she came home, her husband said: 'Wife, what did you do with my child that was in your belly?' 'Husband I threw my

5: Schwimmer E-4,5 (1966-1967) 1973
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23
Mountain Orokaiva

child into the water because it was bad,' she replied. 'I am going to collect cabbage.'

(*Commentary*: The reference to the water is the first of a series of apparent lies which always hide a symbolic truth. In this case it is easy to see the meaning, as several myths exist linking the origin of the taro with water. In one myth a woman was prodding the ground with a digging stick. She found water there (and this was the origin of water); later taro grew in that spot. In another myth a boy and girl who were siblings were washed away in a flood on a coconut tree. At the place where they finally landed they discovered taro. Taro, being identified with a human child, is thought of a growing in the water of the womb. The growth of the taro plant requires a very great deal of water and heavy rain so that the growing plant actually lives in a watery environment, which thus resembles a womb. In this sense, her statement is true.)

4. 'I am going to collect cabbage.' Having said this she climbed a cabbage tree. As she looked down and saw the place where she had put her children, she began to weep. When she returned to the ground, her husband said: 'Wife why did I see you cry when you climbed to collect cabbage?' 'When I went to collect the cabbage the sap squirted into my eyes and I rubbed them,' she said. 'You are lying,' he said.

5. When the children were fully grown, she took them to the mountain far away. She told them their history; 'therefore, I must leave you behind and you must stay,' she said. When she joined her husband again, he asked: 'Why did you stay away so late?' 'As soon as I had done my work and planted my seed (*bere kowitie*), I started on my way home,' she said. 'Woman, you are telling lies,' he replied. When the man understood what his wife had been saying, he went away.

(*Commentary*: When a taro is fully grown it begins to grow shoots on the side of the main rhizome. It is then the duty of the woman to take cuttings from the plant. Strictly speaking these cuttings (Orokaiva: *bere*) are tops of corm-bearing bases of petioles (*Vide* Barrau 1965). These cuttings[1] are taken to a new garden being established, usually, at some distance from the old one. When the husband heard his wife saying this, he understood at once that she had been hiding the offspring she said she had thrown into the 'water'. He could not know, however, that his wife had had twins and this became his undoing.)

6. The two children, all by themselves, made a garden, ate their food and kept alive. The man went to where the two children were staying. The female sibling (*du ate*) had gone to collect taro while the male sibling (*du bite*) was lying asleep with his chest turned upwards in the shelter (*gaga*). It was there that the man found him, understood at once he was his child and cut out his heart and intestines. He ate these, leaving the rest of the body behind for the next day.

(*Commentary*: I do not know whether the narrator of the myth made a mistake when he said at the beginning that the hidden children were 'male twins'. There is no doubt whatever that at the stage the story has now reached they are siblings of opposite sex. While we cannot rule out the possibility of a narrator's mistake, my informant was an unusually reliable one and it is quite possible that there was an actual change of sex. This will become clearer later when we analyse the significance of male and female roles in this tale. The horticultural reference in this passage is to ordinary harvesting routine. The woman digs the taro and places them in a *gaga* or shelter where they stay until

5: Schwimmer E-4,5 (1966-1967) 1973
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23
Mountain Orokaiva

824 773 she takes them home. The brother is clearly identified with taro growing in the field.)

244 539 7. The story tells in more detail than is relevant here how the sister learned what had happened, how a magician from Managalasi brought the brother back to life by giving him the heart and intestines of a wallaby, how this man married the sister and how the young man killed his father when the latter returned to complete his meal. He cut his father into many pieces which were shared out among men whose descendants became the various population groups in the Northern District, as discussed in Chapter III.

The myth takes us through two complete cultivation cycles from the planting of the *bere*, the covering over with weeds to protect them from the sun, the gradual growth of the plants under the care of the woman, to the shifting of a new *bere* to a new garden, and finally the growing of these new *bere* to maturity. I was given no explanation as to why the myth contains two cultivation cycles rather than one, but it becomes clearer if we regard the myth, on the horticultural level, as symbolising the domestication of what was at one time a wild plant. At this level, the myth starts with the finding of wild taro and the transplanting of the *bere* of that taro to a garden clearing. When these *bere* grow to maturity, new *bere* are taken from them and these in turn are transplanted. The products of this second planting are regarded as properly domesticated taro.

One may well wonder why the second cultivation cycle was introduced into the myth at all. Direct inquiry did not produce wholly satisfactory answers. [262] People no longer eat taro that grows in the bush, I was told, because it does not taste sweet, it is small, it hurts the mouth. Nobody transplants wild taro *bere* to cultivated gardens nowadays; this was done only in the times of the ancestors. Informants' attitudes to this question were often of this kind when we were [775] discussing the jungle. It was above all a place where the ghosts (*sovai*) lived and therefore dangerous. Wild pigs, especially, often harbour ghosts. If plants or animals are domesticated, it is the dispelling of ghostly essences that is the objective of the practices followed. I shall show this in more detail when discussing the domestication of pigs. Taking into account this fear and suspicion of the bush, it is understandable that a seed taken from the bush is not regarded as domesticated just because it has grown to maturity in a garden. A plant grown from a bush seed is regarded as still being contaminated by *sovai* influence. It is only the second harvest that can be regarded as wholly belonging to the domesticated domain.

[775] We have already met the same idea when discussing the taboo on taro-growing on a dead man's land. This taro is effectively contaminated in the same way as [784] bush taro. It is not eaten by those whom it endangers. The next crop planted is still dangerous, and it is only the second planting after the previous owner's death that is free from taboo.

This discussion has already developed one of the main themes of the myth, namely the opposition between bush and garden, the wild and the sown, the dwelling place of spirits and the cultivated domain from which they are carefully banished. If we now turn to the message transmitted by the myth at the social level, we find a similar opposition, namely that between Totoima and his wife. Totoima who kills his own children, using his tusks as he does so, has partly a pig

5: Schwimmer E-4,5 (1966-1967) 1973
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23
Mountain Orokaiva

nature, partly a human nature, and these aspects are only partly differentiated. He ravages taro lying in the *gaga* in the manner of a wild pig. The wild taro *bere* planted by the woman in the beginning of the myth are fitly equated with his 'children' because Totoima's realm is the bush; bush taro are the children he might be expected to engender. The garden, however, is his wife's realm. It is she who nurses taro to maturity and who nurtures her family. She too has a dual nature, as she nurtures Totoima and also conspires to kill him. This second aspect is found in numerous myths concerning Totoima's wife. In the present version not only the wife but also the daughter is involved in conspiracy.

The taro are her children, and it is right that Totoima should eat them. She feeds them to him. However, she places restrictions on Totoima's appetite. The *bere* of the domestic taro must be preserved for planting. Hence it is the woman's duty to withhold these from her husband. Woman's two aspects – nurture and domestication – are crucial in the ritual statements made through gifts of taro.

Here we encounter again the dichotomy in sex roles to which I referred in the previous chapter. The male tends to be concerned with the killing of enemies and wild animals, the driving out of ghosts, the felling of bush before a garden can be made. On the other hand, the female is identified with the cultivation of taro. The *dema* of the taro are regularly called upon in drum songs performed at harvest time:

Bako jape teijo jape bako
Punduga kovari terijo jape bako, etc.

'Taro-being, ancestress, come to our aid, ancestress, taro-being; with the *punduga* harvesting help us, ancestress, taro-being', etc., where *punduga* is a variety of taro and the song continues with lines similar to the second one, invoking a great number of taro varieties, one after the other.

Taro, clearly, is a feminine plant. The first taro plant is found by a married woman in several myths I have recorded, though in others it was found by a brother and sister travelling together. One may well ask why it is, if taro is a feminine plant, that in this myth (and in others) we find its origin associated with two siblings of opposite sex (*du*), and why in particular it was the male sibling who was lying in the *gaga* while the female one was in the field. Those who like to impute laziness to the Orokaiva male may say that this scene is only too typical, but one cannot seriously believe this myth to indulge in caricature. In my explanation I shall anticipate an argument developed at greater length in Chapter VIII. It is a male sex role to clear a garden and give it to a woman; it is a female sex role to grow taro and give it to a man. These gifts are complementary and mediate the relationship between man and woman. The Orokaiva will classify a garden as a feminine thing 'because it is given to the woman' and a harvested taro as a masculine thing 'because it is given to the man'. This is why the taro lying in the *gaga* was a male sibling.

Evidence presented in the course of this chapter will show that Orokaiva regard taro as having a dual nature: while in the earth, they are identified with the woman who nurtures them and who regards them and nurses them as her children. When harvested they are victims to be killed, cut up and cooked and finally eaten. In this role of victims they are male, because the male is the killer

5: Schwimmer E-4,5 (1966-1967) 1973
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23
Mountain Orokaiva

574 The first plans for a feast are laid at least one year in advance, as it involves
621 extra plantings of taro as well as economising on pigs. By the end of December,
● 244 the feast taro ought to have finished flowering and the tubers ought to have formed. It is only then that the chances of an abundant harvest can be reasonably assessed. The feast-giver stealthily tours the village gardens to see whether the taro are 'ready', collecting tubers in gardens where tubers have formed and collecting flowers in those gardens which are lagging behind. He hides these specimens in his house. If his examination has been successful, he calls a meeting attended by all the men of the village (but not the women) at which the assembled people formally acknowledge that they are planning a feast. The leader will display the taro and the flowers he has collected, thus demonstrating visibly whose gardens will and will not be able to contribute food to the feast. The meeting decides who will be invited to the feast. The men share the meat of an animal, traditionally a pig, but nowadays often a rooster.

This ritual is clearly intended to remove obstacles that might prevent
[773] harmonious social relations from being established at the feast. I have already discussed[5] a myth which contained a charter for this custom of examining the gardens: it told the story of a food shortage which caused a quarrel and concluded with the enunciation by a *dema* of a rule that feasts should in future be held only in times of abundance. It is not sufficient, of course, for the people to say and to believe that there will be abundance. Abundance must be established ritually so as to be placed beyond human dispute.

574 The pig sacrifice at this meeting serves to remove any latent hostility between
621 the men of the group, so that all will be united and co-operate unreservedly
[554] towards the success of the feast. Though the *pondo kiari embo* tends to be a man of much influence in the village, he does not normally have any authority over resources held by any extended family other than his own. It is only for the specific purpose of feast-giving that he is given such authority, and it is limited in time from the meeting just described until the day of the feast itself. The
[422] meeting thus temporarily changes the authority structure of the village. The
[425] growing taro crop and the available pigs become, at least ideally, the corporate property of the village, whereas normally they are family property. The *pondo kiari embo* becomes, at least formally and ritually, the controller of this property. The unit of the group of offerers of the sacrifice is a necessary condition for the success of the rituals that follow.

621 The same principle underlies one detail of the ritual taro display to which I
574 have not yet made reference. At the meeting 'special betelnuts' (I do not know
431 just what medicine is used on them) are distributed by the feast-giver to be
276 shared, after the meeting, between the men and their wives. The men are to ask
562 their wives whether the taro are ready. This is a ritual question, as the men go to the garden daily, but it is the women who are supposed to have charge of growing taro and – in a ritual sense – the men therefore do not know. After receiving an answer to this question, the husband will share the 'special' betelnut with his wife. While the enacting of this ritual would make even the most slow-witted of women aware of what is afoot, the women should still supposedly remain ignorant of the plan to hold a feast. Informants readily admit that this ignorance is a fiction. The significance of the shared betelnut is to provide against the anger a wife might feel when the taro harvest over which she has ritual control is

5: Schwimmer E-4,5 (1966-1967) 1973
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23
Mountain Orokaiva

The sacrifice undoubtedly transforms the nature of the victim, as the meat, after the analogy of the body of Totoima, is divided among all the guests, who will 'greatly multiply' by the *ivo* the meat confers after this simple sacrament.

After the sacrifice the group who offered it becomes irrevocably separated from the victim. The composition of the group to whom consumption of the sacrificed pig is forbidden is as follows: the pig's 'mother' and 'father', their siblings, their parents, their parents' siblings, and their children. Infringement of the taboo is said to lead to the death of one of the sons of the pig's 'mother'. I was told that the taboo lapses once a woman's daughters have themselves given birth to children. We may safely deduce from this last limitation of the range of the taboo that it serves to protect the woman's power of child-bearing. The taboo does not reach to the third generation: it does not include the grandparents of the pig-rearers. Nor does it include parallel or cross-cousins. These rules emphasise the position of the pig as a member of the family group. The sacrificer of a pig is identified with Totoima precisely in that both killed their own children.

The membership of host and guest groups is defined mainly by residence: one village invites another. It also occurs, in multi-clan villages, that the two groups comprise only some of the local clan groups of the host and guest village. I did not note cases of two-clan villages where this happened, but it does occur in four-clan villages such as Hohorita and Sasembata. Some close relatives of the hosts, though not resident in the host village, may decide to attend and may make a food contribution. The guest group that is invited usually matches the host group approximately in strength. If there is a wide disprepancy in numbers there is a tendency for several closely-linked villages to join together as hosts or to be invited together as guests.

Relationships between hosts and guests are cultivated on both the collective and the family level. The Orokaiva have no large houses for guests, so that each family of guests is accommodated with a family of hosts. If two villages have never feasted together partnerships are arranged at a preliminary meeting, always making allowance for previously existing relationships. Once partnerships are established they become a standing reciprocal arrangement, inherited by the children of the original partners. A good part of the planning of a feast consists of amassing suitable gifts to be made to one's visiting partner. It is he who must, above all, be impressed by his host and overwhelmed with generosity. On the collective level, guests are expected to dance for their hosts and to carry out rain-making and crop-promoting rituals.

When I asked why the help of guest sorcerers was necessary to ensure increase of the food supply, I was told that if taro grows poorly in a garden it is assumed that an enemy is using *puripuri* (a form of magic) against this garden, thus stopping the taro from flourishing. When a whole village has poor results, it is believed that someone has used medicine against *all* the gardens. According to this reasoning, the task of the friendly magicians at a feast is to remove their own previous black magic from the gardens. As shown in previous chapters, the assumption is always that parties meeting at a feast have been living in something like imperfect harmony. This implies that there may have been sorcery.

The harvest feast is, therefore, an occasion when the community acts as a corporate group to meet a magical danger which transcends the individual. A

244 Breadfruit trees grow around the village and in garden areas, some being planted and others self-sown but preserved when garden sites are cleared. All are individually owned. Harvesting is relatively easy, the fruit being removed from the tree with the aid of a knife attached to a long stick. Sago apart, the breadfruit comprises a major element of diet during the dry months.

[262]

433 While the inland Orokaiva are essentially food-gardeners - a [224] fact dictated largely by the density of occupation where intensive [512] utilisation of the forest has greatly reduced its plant and animal resources - both hunting and sago-making are of limited importance and occupy 1.8 and 0.4 hours per man-week respectively.

224 Traditionally the Sivepe people claim to have hunted feral pig [130] high on the slopes of Mt Lamington but this has ceased now they 'have too much to do'. No such pigs are found in the bush adjacent to the village but bandicoot, wallaby, cus-cus, flying fox, and a variety of birds are not uncommon. Periodically domestic pigs [411] enter gardens whereupon they are usually hunted out and killed, either by the irate gardener or the owner of the animal. While a spear may be used in the latter case, shotguns are now often used or special hunting parties organised where a net is employed. Use of the two shotguns held in the village is usually confined to the owner and others who contributed to its purchase. Such hunting, with the aid of a torch, is normally done on moonlit nights and is most common in the dry season when flying fox are attracted to the ripe breadfruit.

[512] During the survey, however, most hunting was done during period III when 4.8 hours per man-week were recorded, the avowed object being to 'stockpile' smoked meat for the annual Christmas feast held on Sasembata mission station. Large intra- and inter-village group drives were organised daily for two weeks, the activities being initiated by the priest blessing the dogs. Wallabies were the principal animals caught. During both weeks time spent hunting exceeded 11 hours per man-week, or more than that devoted to taro gardening. These drives were facilitated by a spell of unusually dry weather.

223 252 Sago-making is a highly seasonal activity. In Sivepe, production [22] is confined primarily to the dry season when 1.5 hours per man-week were spent on it, rising to 6.4 hours in week 16 when only taro [512] gardening, among subsistence activities, was of greater importance. The work is arduous and is only undertaken with reluctance as the [461] flour must be produced as quickly as possible following the felling of the tree. It is one of the few activities not interrupted by heavy rain.

[461] Because of the very high labour requirements, sago-making is essentially a group enterprise and, not being popular, is only commenced when a number of families have little producing food in their

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 87]